DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 515 CS 502 788

AUTHOR Saxon, John D.
TITLE Never Argue with a Kiwi: International Exchange Debating in New Zealand.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (65th, San Antonio, TX, November 10-13, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Education; *Debate; *Exchange Programs; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *International Educational Exchange; *Public Speaking
IDENTIFIERS *New Zealand

ABSTRACT

A report concerning the value of the international exchange debate tour of New Zealand sponsored by the Committee on International Discussion and Debate of the Speech Communication Association is given in this paper. The report provides an examination of the goals and benefits of international exchange debating, discusses how this particular tour pertained to those goals, and discusses the nature of debate in New Zealand. It concludes that the increase in international understanding and the new knowledge gained from noting a different and less formal debating style was invaluable and that the program should continue. (MKM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John D. Saxon

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED181515

"NEVER ARGUE WITH A KIWI: INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE DEBATING IN NEW ZEALAND"

John D. Saxon*

"Academic Debate: An International Perspective"
Committee on International Discussion and Debate
Speech Communication Association
65th Annual Convention
November 12, 1979
San Antonio, Texas

It was with pleasure that I accepted Ron Matlon's invitation to join in this panel this afternoon, for few things in my life have provided me with as much enjoyment, insight and understanding as my international exchange debate tour of New Zealand in 1975. I therefore could never refuse the opportunity to sing paeans of praise on behalf of the CIDD exchange program.

My brief remarks will be divided into three parts (or, as I could have stated it, like all good debaters, I've got three points of analysis): first, an examination of the goals and benefits of international exchange debating; second, how my particular tour pertains to those goals; and, third, a brief discussion of the nature of debate in the country I visited.

---

*John D. Saxon (B.A., J.D., The University of Alabama; M.A., The University of North Carolina) is Assistant Counsel, Subcommittee on Jurisprudence and Governmental Relations, United States Senate Judiciary Committee. He has taught speech communication at Brewer State Junior College, The University of Alabama, and The University of North Carolina (where he was also Assistant Director of Debate).

CS502788

I. The Goals and Benefits of International Exchange Debating

In my inexpert opinion, the benefits of international exchange debating are inestimable, and they derive primarily --but not exclusively--from the act of the international exchange itself.

As one scans the list of countries with which the United States has conducted exchange debates, it reads like a partial "Who's Who" of the United Nations: Great Britain, the Philippines, Scotland, Germany, Puerto Rico, Turkey, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, India, Sweden, Denmark, Japan, the Soviet Union and Poland. Can anyone seriously question that traveling to these countries, being exposed to the richness of these diverse peoples and lands, makes you a citizen of the world? Can anyone seriously question that it leads to an appreciation of other peoples, other cultures, other histories, other belief systems? That it leads to an appreciation of the differences which make the human race so varied, so rich, and so diverse? That it creates an awareness of the value of travel itself which, if continued, leads to future cultural enrichment? And, perhaps most importantly, can anyone seriously question that international exchanges such as those sponsored under CIDD auspices foster the creation of good will between

and among nations and peoples?

I must concur with the statement of former British Prime Minister Edward Heath, who wrote, in 1972, "There is little doubt that visits by students to other countries to match their wits with others in the debating arena are beneficial not just to the individuals concerned but also to the cause of international understanding." He concluded that "endeavors such as (those of the SCA) deserve every encouragement."[1]

If, as McLuhan contends, we do live in a "global village," if ours is a world of increasing interdependency, there is considerable merit to undertaking, supporting and financing measures and programs which enhance mutual understanding, cooperation and harmony among the world community of diverse nationalities and societies. That the CIDD-sponsored international exchange debate program serves this end is, to this grateful participant, unquestioned.

Exchange debating, then, breeds international understanding. Such understanding breeds respect, and, in turn, mutual trust. And I think I can say without hyperbole that it is from such trust that peace is bred. As Einstein said many years ago, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding." Recognizing that peace is the

---

[1]Prime Minister Edward Heath, letter of July 31, 1972, quoted in Robert N. Hall and Jack L. Rhodes, Fifty Years of International Debate, 1922-1972 (Speech Communication Association: New York, 1972).

result of a slow, deliberate process, President Kennedy reminded us in an address to the United Nations General Assembly in 1963: "Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures. And however undramatic the pursuit of peace, that pursuit must go on."

Finally, on the benefits of international exchange debating, it should go without saying that as a communicator, one's flexibility and efficacy are enhanced by exposure to debaters whose purposes, style, delivery, and methods of proof are different. In relation to the New Zealand tour, I will further develop this point below.

II. The New Zealand Tour and the Goals and Benefits of International Exchange Debating

In relating the New Zealand tour to the goals and benefits of the program, I found it did give me a much deeper--a much richer--understanding of the land and the people of New Zealand.

I found the Kiwis to be a friendly, robust and healthy people . . . ruggedly handsome, proud of their history, culture, and--perhaps most importantly--their independence. They are a people of great warmth and hospitality, and who possess a keen sense of humor.

The country itself was beautiful, and, at times, breathtaking. Ron Matlon admonished each of your panelists that our

presentations were not to be comprised of personal tales, and that is not my intention. But I know of no better way to relate the benefits of my New Zealand tour than to list briefly a few of the activities which kept us busy, and of the natural features which impressed us so deeply.

We swam in the Pacific; went beachcombing; saw caves, cathedrals and campuses; bathed in hot sulfur pools; saw geysers, volcanoes, rugby matches, crystal clear freshwater lakes, and rolling green hillsides dotted with cattle and sheep. We saw sheep being sheared and visited a sheep ranch. We saw snow-capped peaks and ourselves donned skis in the Southern Alps. We rode in the coastal waters along the northernmost tip of the North Island on a lengthy sightseeing trip, and later took a three-hour ride in the open seas aboard a gigantic ferry. We saw a concert by the Maoris, the tan-skinned natives of New Zealand, and were permitted to attend a meeting of a Maori tribal council--a rare feat for non-Maoris. We toured the government buildings in the capital, met with Members of Parliament and the Cabinet, saw sessions of New Zealand's Supreme Court in operation, toured botanical gardens, and rode cable cars over the hilly streets of Wellington. We toured eleven New Zealand cities, and in eight of them we stayed in the homes of Kiwis--sharing with them their food and drink, their warm hospitality, their family rituals and daily routines.

I came from these memorable experiences with a deep--and I believe accurate--belief that I had sensed the essence of the New Zealand people, that I was one step closer to the international understanding of which Heath, Einstein and Kennedy so eloquently spoke and wrote. I believe, then, that my tour met in every way the goals--and yielded the benefits--for which it was arranged.

III. The Nature of Debate in New Zealand

Robert Benchley was once asked during the course of a college exam to discuss the arbitration of the American-British conflict over offshore fishing rights--first from the point of view of the British and then from the point of view of the United States. His reply: "I know absolutely nothing about the offshore fishing dispute from the point of view of the British; I know even less about the position held by the United States; I, therefore, should like to discuss the conflict from the viewpoint of the fish." Unlike Benchley, I am able to address the topic for discussion from the point of view of the United States.

From the somewhat parochial American perspective, New Zealand debate is much less formal. It is a hybrid, resembling not so much debate as we know it as a composite of dramatic interpretation, persuasion, extemporaneous and after dinner speaking. As you might expect, it is not altogether unlike British debating. There is comparatively little use of logic

and reasoning, even less use of evidence. A "rebuttal" is less a point-by-point refutation as a persuasive oration given to humorous appeals. And that one can draw parallels to the stage is not unwarranted: there is much dramatic style and delivery, a not infrequent tendency to lapse into soliloquies, and a pronounced proclivity for literary and theatrical allusions.

For debaters given to taking "flow sheets," talking fast, and "spreading" their opponents with three points of analysis and five pieces of evidence for each of their contentions, such characteristics are, at first, unsettling. But, on the whole, such a style of debate has significant educational value for American debaters. It helps them become more informal, spontaneous, humorous and flexible. Given that the Kiwis place maximum emphasis on audience appeal and a minimum of emphasis on doctrine and dogma, it makes one a more realistic communicator in that it requires one to adapt to--and keep the attention of--the audience, while being less concerned about making or refuting individual points. It teaches you to use humor, to appreciate it, and--more importantly--to expect occasional humoring and heckling from your audience.

The style of New Zealand debating was more casual, more extemporaneous, and conversational--all qualities from which American debate could benefit. Undue emphasis by American debaters on the technical points of debate to the detriment

of the more humanistic elements of audience analysis and appeal leads to a great many won battles but lost wars. Forensic judges and students of argumentation theory might give American debaters a particular decision, but I learned in New Zealand that an audience--and not necessarily just a New Zealand audience--might decide by different--and who can say incorrect--criteria.

Finally, it is easier in New Zealand than here to enjoy debate and discussion for the sake of debating and discussing--and not for the sake of winning. One of the great benefits of my tour is that we engaged not only in formal exhibition debates, but also in real discussions with Kiwis--discussions about, for example, the New Zealand economy, American involvement in Southeast Asia, Watergate, and the superannuation proposals of the New Zealand government (which, I must confess, I still do not completely understand).

SUMMARY

In summary, I cannot say enough positive things about international exchange debating in general, and my tour of New Zealand in particular. I must thank the SCA--and Bob Hall, who so ably administers the program for the SCA; the Committee on International Discussion and Debate; and last, but not least, A. Craig Baird, for founding the international debate program as we know it over half a century ago at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.

If, in closing, I could offer a single constructive suggestion it would be that, although the expense of bringing students from countries other than Great Britain greatly increases the cost of a tour,[2] it is absolutely imperative that such exchanges continue. If we are to have true cultural and ethnic diversity, if we are to really achieve a level of international understanding which meaningfully contributes to global harmony, we must have exchanges with non-English speaking, non-Western, non-democratic nations. There are, no doubt, problems which inhere to such a policy; such countries may send us debaters whose ability to speak English is unknown or weak, whose ability to use (or understand our use of) humor is limited, and whose proficiency at American style debating leaves much to be desired.[3] But I think the advantages in international understanding to be derived from such a policy outweigh any of these inherent limitations.

Teddy Roosevelt stated three-quarters of a century ago: "The United States does not have a choice as to whether it will or will not play a great part in the world. Fate has made that choice for us. The only question is whether we will play that

---

[2]Hall and Rhodes, Fifty Years of International Debate, 1922-1972, p. 17.

[3]Hall and Rhodes, Fifty Years of International Debate, 1922-1972, p. 19.

part well or badly." I firmly believe that international exchange debating such as that in which all of your panelists participated will better enable us to play our part in the world, and to play it well.